**INSET Training in Cuban Universities**

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**Abstract**

The Cuban Ministry of Higher Education (MES) has established the organization of methodological work in universities and the guidelines for teacher training, lesson planning and students´ assessment among other aspects. These guidelines were the basis for the design of the teacher training system of activities in the Language Center of the University of Matanzas (LC-UM).

In this paper the authors describe the system of activities used at the Language Center of the University of Matanzas to train teachers in service (INSET) that is based in a continuous educational training rather than in courses, considering that systematic methodological training of teachers in service is more effective. The stages of this process are named and described in the present paper as well as the role of the trainers.

Key words: Language Center of the University of Matanzas (LC-UM), system of activities, in-service training

**Introduction**

The concept pre-professional training for students of the Bachelor in Education English Program at the University of Matanzas, Cuba, has always been a subject of great interest for instructors in the LC-UM. These students take a non-traditional degree course in which they spend the first two years receiving intensive courses in English Language, Pedagogy and Didactics, and during the last two years they are inserted as part of the staff of the LC-UM to finish their education. The aim of this paper is to describe the system of activities that has been designed for the continuous professional development of these students/teachers. We are going to refer to them throughout this paper as teacher trainees. It is, basically, very similar to what Fullan (2005) states as professional development and it also includes certain processes and practices that may help teachers and, in our case, undergraduate teacher trainees to improve their teaching skills, knowledge and attitude and such improvement assures change in the intellectual, physical, emotional, and social development of each student.

This process of professional development starts with the in-service practice of teacher trainees, who have to start teaching before graduation because of the needs of our educational system.

For the design of the program we studied previous experiences from several authors, such as Muhammad U. Farooq Taif (2016), Bolam, R. (1982), David, H.. (1995), Somers, John; Sikorova Eva, (2002), Altun Karadeniz, Taner (2011, Ulla B, Mark (2016, Vasudevan, Bose (2014 ), Wallace, M. (1991) Training Foreign Language Teachers. Cambridge: CUP. and others. All of the above mentioned studies have focused on issues related to actual practicum teaching; from practicum experience to assessment, their strengths and weaknesses. These related studies are evidence that practicum teaching research has become more interesting in the field of teacher education. Villegas-Reimers (2003) and Díaz-Maggioli (2004), considered that continuing professional development (CPD) must engage teachers in reflective and collaborative work including teachers’ skills, knowledge, and experience. Also, such programmes may provide teachers with opportunities to develop their professional practice and receive feedback on it. This kind of practice engages teachers as learners.

In 1982, Bolam defined the In-service Education of Teachers as: “Those education and training activities engaged in by secondary and primary school teachers and principals, following their initial professional certification, and intended mainly or exclusively to improve their professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order that they can educate children more effectively”. Although we are working with undergraduate EFL teachers who work in the Language Center of Matanzas University, the task is the same as the one mentioned by Bolam for secondary and primary school teachers.

The In-service education for undergraduate EFL teachers in the Language Center of Matanzas University (LC-UM) is based mainly in the systematic practical assistance, rather than in courses because we consider that the immediacy is of vital importance to guarantee the quality of the teaching and learning process (TLP) as the course develops. It is not practical to wait until the end of the term in order to solve the difficulties detected in class observation. That is why we consider that the systematic methodological training of teacher trainees is more effective and immediate.

In Cuban universities, teacher training is conceived as systematic attention to the teacher´s needs to enhance the TLP. It is an ongoing process of didactic activities developed from top to bottom and vice versa within the university academic structure.

The Cuban Ministry of Higher Education (MES) has established the organization of methodological work aiming at the continuous professional development of teachers in universities and it sets the guidelines for teacher training, lesson planning, and students´ assessment among other aspects. These guidelines were the basis to design the teacher training system of activities in our LC.

Our concern in this paper is related to the teacher training process that takes place in the LC-UM. We are going to share our experiences in the training of our teacher trainees.

**Development**

In the LC-UM the in-service training of teachers goes from the theoretical aspects to the practical application in real classes. A system of activities has been designed to fulfill the desired results. It is structured in four stages as follows:

* Methodological training sessions
* Methodological lesson and feedback
* Open observation lesson and feedback
* Class observation and feedback

Stage 1.

The Methodological training session is the type of methodological academic activity that fosters debate, analysis, updating and decision making about the teaching learning process within the department. These sessions are aimed at finding solutions, instructing teachers and sharing the latest tendencies in ELT. These sessions are led by the head of the department or senior teachers.

Stage 2

The Methodological lesson is the type of academic methodological activity that instructs teachers about methodological aspects to contribute to their better training. These activities may be developed with the whole department or in smaller groups of teachers according to the courses or levels they teach. The activity may be organized in two different ways: instructive lessons and demonstrative lessons (demo-lessons). In an instructive methodological lesson teachers are instructed on how to teach specific aspects of the language or a specific content of the syllabus. In this kind of lesson, teachers are encouraged to analyze and debate on the topic in question. The demonstrative methodological lesson, as its name indicates, is a model lesson carried out in real classroom conditions oriented to demonstrate how to teach specific aspects of the language or a specific content of the syllabus.

Both types of methodological lessons aim at the training of teachers with the difference that the instructive lesson is workshop style and the demo lesson is very practical for the in-service teachers to experience first-hand how to teach English as a foreign language. These sessions are also led by the head of the department or senior teachers. According to our experience and practice, the most effective are the demo-lessons because they are delivered in real classroom environment, and trainees become aware of the inevitable and unexpected issues that teachers have to face and solve in the classroom. They also realize the fact that the lesson is not an inflexible plan to follow. It has to be adapted to the students’ characteristics, needs, classroom conditions, group size and available teaching resources. As Rod Bolitho (1979) expresses in is article “On Demonstration Lessons”, the methodological lesson cannot be a theatrical performance where trainees are presented with an artificial classroom situation that is not part of a course, i.e. an isolated lesson unrelated to past or future lessons in a course. Another drawback would be the absence of teacher-student relationship in a world that demands language learning approaches in which the students have become the center of the teaching-learning process.

Methodological lessons are followed by open observation sessions in which a teacher puts into practice what was taught or oriented in the methodological lesson. There has to be a correspondence between what was analyzed in the methodological lesson and what is observed on the open lesson.

Stage 3.

The open observation lesson consists of two parts: the class observation and the analysis and feedback. For class observation trainees are provided with an observation checklist that they have to fill in and later use in the analysis and feedback sessions. These sessions may be done with the whole department or in tutorial groups with the in-service teachers. In our experience the second part has always been the most productive and instructive principally for the new teachers because the feedback points out the positive aspects that provide the best practices to follow, and also the aspects that need to be improved along with suggestions on how to do things better. The analysis and feedback is led by the same teacher who delivered the methodological lesson.

Stage 4.

Class observation is also part of our teacher training system. It is the moment in which the effectiveness of the training system is assessed. These observations are based on the assumption that trainees should put into practice what they have learned on their degree course and through the training activities of the department mentioned above.

It is established that the head of the department and the head teachers for each level of learning are the ones entitled to observe classes. This stage of class observation is somewhat different from the traditional one because in this case it is a two-way observation:

* the tutor observes the trainee and gives feedback
* the trainee observes his tutor teaching and they discuss how the lesson went

There is still another variant in class observation. It is peer observation having the tutor monitoring and facilitating the activity.

For peer observation trainees are given a briefing on how to observe a class and complete the checklist for class observation so that they are able to give positive feedback and avoid tension and dilemmas that may arise when someone feels that his work is being assess by outsiders. The role of an experience tutor is of outmost importance to make the feedback observation sessions a moment of benefit and learning for observers and the teachers been observed to improve their teaching style and classroom practice.

Due to the characteristics of our language center, where more than 50% of the academic personnel are undergraduate students who have not finished their education and need to be tutored by more experienced teachers, we also use tutors in order to personalize training.

The tutorship includes training and advice on ELT, lesson planning, assessment, test development and class observation. On the other hand, our tutors are also responsible for instructing new teachers on issues related to class management and work discipline.

The system of activities presented in this paper for the training of our in-service teachers has been put into practice at the LC-UM for the last two academic years. We have observed the trainees have improved in their performance when teaching and when giving solution to classroom issues.

**Conclusion**

This in-service education and training of teacher trainees in the LC-UM is based mainly on the systematic practical assistance rather than in courses.

This kind of in-service education and training provides the trainees with the basic preparations to start teaching EFL and tools to improve their performance as the course develops, as well as the quality of the TLP. We consider that this systematic practical assistance is more effective and immediate.

The guidelines set by the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education were the basis to design the teacher training system of activities in our LC. It is designed in four stages of methodological work that has proved to be effective so far: methodological training sessions, methodological lesson and feedback, open observation lesson and feedback, class observation and feedback.

The briefing on how to observe a class and the checklist for class observation given to trainees for peer observation enable them to give positive feedback and avoid tension and dilemmas that arise when someone feels that his work is being assess by outsiders.

The role of the tutor is also of outmost importance to guarantee the effectiveness of the system and the feedback observation sessions are moment of benefit and learning for observers in order to improve their teaching style and classroom practice.

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